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Early Modern Marginalia and #earlymoderntwitter

Sjoerd Levelt

A most learned Dutch author hath maintained
that birds doe speake and converse one with another

– John Stafford, 1655¹

The medium has dictated
that you are in the allegorical space of a bird

– Dorothy Kim, 2014²

Early Modern Twitter-storms

Throughout the early modern period, it was widely known that birds have voices, and *The Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer’s great creation, reconvened at irregular intervals.³ The cacophony of tweets could lead to true Twitter-storms, and violent battles of birds were regularly reported,⁴ even sung about.⁵ Different birds were known to comment on affairs in ways characteristic to their own species,⁶ and while many concerned themselves primarily with erotic subjects⁷—some voyeuristically commenting on the frolicking of young couples in London⁸—others even addressed the practicalities of government in their tweets.⁹

In an observation which also applies to early modern marginalia, medievalist Dorothy Kim has noted that “[i]f the medieval manuscript is a recording medium that allows scholar[s] now to see the conversations and connected marginal glosses of individual readers, then Twitter is the digital medium that replicates this practice the most but with comments all the time and in real time for individual thinkers.”¹⁰ Like early modern marginalia, tweets are

used to engage with text in a plethora of ways: to annotate, explain, comment, cross-reference, call attention, memorise, disparage, satirise, ridicule, praise, translate, summarise, &c.—and to make apparently entirely extraneous, sometimes unintelligible, comments. Twitter is used by scholars in Early Modern Studies to comment on, relate to, teach and examine the sources they study, and to establish communities of readers, as well as communities of learning.¹¹ The generic links to other types of writing which we see in early modern marginalia is mirrored by the ways in which #earlymoderntwitter communicates with other scholarly disciplines as well as other fields of knowledge (including current events, sports, entertainment and gossip), within a knowledge ecosystem of various interrelated media (including other social media such as Facebook, Instagram, but also (increasingly online) traditional publishing. This paper will survey both the approaches to early modern marginalia on Twitter, and Twitter as a location of annotation of early modern texts.

[INSERT FIGURE 11.1 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.1. A small doodle of a bird, in the margin between woodcuts of an early printed book, tweeted with the hashtag #MarginaliaMonday.]

Networked scholarship

Twitter has become a prominent location for networked scholarship, by which is meant scholars' "use of participatory technologies and online social networks to share, reflect upon, critique, improve, validate, and further their scholarship."¹² Networks of scholars, and non-scholars, regularly coalesce around common interests. Such coalescence can be driven by a hashtag—a word or phrase (written together) preceded by a '#'—which allows for easy searching of all tweets using that tag, and for real time following of the conversations using it. Thus, for example, the hashtag #marginaliamonday, started by Annotated Books Online (@AboBooks), a digital archive of early modern annotated books (www.annotatedbooksonline.com), has become a space on Twitter where scholars and rare

books librarians share examples of marginal annotations they encounter during their research and cataloguing. [INSERT FIGURE 11.2 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.2. Tweets, one from a rare books librarian (left), and one from a researcher involved in coding of digitized early modern marginalia, using the hashtag #marginaliamonday.¹³]

I myself started #flyleaffriday, which has become a hashtag with which academics, librarians, and occasionally collectors, share images of flyleaves and other parts of book bindings, forming a semi-continuous conversation about flyleaves and how they connect to our research interests. Through hashtag use, networked scholarship can also serve community-building purposes, based around shared interests. By the non-symmetrical nature of its connections (i.e., where connections between two users are not necessarily reciprocal), by the connectivity that hashtags provide, and by the wide dissemination individual posts can receive through retweets (the sharing of a tweet by someone else among one's followers), Twitter encourages new connections between users who would perhaps less quickly connect in more confining, more walled-off social environments; it also encourages conversations between scholars from different disciplines (history and literature; early modern and medieval) as well as between historical scholars, librarians, and the wider public. This has impact on scholarship, too: the labour of librarians, for example, has become much more visible to many scholars who reap its benefits, but would have previously done so without being immediately aware of the support structures that provide those benefits. Live tweeting has become a regular occurrence at humanities conferences and seminars, where it is used as a medium to involve people who are not physically present in ongoing dialogues. Thus, a conference Twitter feed allows for the discussion of the subject of the conference to reach beyond the confines of the lecture room and the conference venue. Responses to one's tweets, in the form of retweets and 'likes,' as well as tweeted responses, provide instant feedback on user's activities of a kind that scholarship published in traditional media (e.g., journal articles

and monographs) rarely instigates. Rather than having to wait for that one review, or that elusive citation, tweets are instantly responded to, and by fellow academics as well as non-academic viewers, or not at all.

Some hashtags provide a connection for large constituencies—such as #twitterstorians, a catch-all for anyone, but particularly scholars, with a historical interest—while others are much more specific. Significant hashtags around which users with an interest in early modern studies connect in particular are, for example, #earlymoderntwitter, #nuntastic, and #recusantsbaby. Such more specialised hashtags, often originally stemming from seminars or conference sessions, as in the case of the last mentioned, can be used to bring sources, resources, and conversations to the attention of interested colleagues; #ShakeRace, for example, functions as an alert to, as well as lasting archive of, online resources and conversations about race and Shakespeare. Like a manicule, the pointing hands found in the margins of so many medieval and early modern books, and any other “nota” sign, the hashtag serves to call attention to relevant information—and like the manicule also serves memorisation and information retrieval purposes:¹⁴ the hashtag both immediately highlights, and makes it possible to find back relevant information and discussions at a later date. [INSERT FIGURE 11.3 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.3. Tweet of an image of pen trials on a pastedown in a binding, including a series of manicules, tweeted with hashtag #manicule.]

Academic support

Hashtag-based communities can also provide support networks: #amwriting, #deadlineexchange and #writingaccountability all provide support for academic labour, while #PhDchat and #ECRchat have developed into active discussion and support fora for doctoral students and early career researchers of all disciplines. Indeed, Twitter is regularly used as an

extended academic support network. Speaking from my own experience, this has been particularly important for me when I was working, when I first joined Twitter, as a researcher away from my academic base—meaning I could not benefit from regular face-to-face conversations with my colleagues—and, more recently, as a scholar in Turkey whose academic network due to disciplinary reasons is primarily focused on the United Kingdom (and secondarily on the United States and the Netherlands).

Through Twitter, it is possible to reach a large group of people quickly; for this reason, the medium can be particularly useful for seeking help with small queries. Thus, for example, scholars transcribing early modern manuscripts regularly take to Twitter to ask for help with words they are uncertain about how to decipher. [INSERT FIGURE 11.4 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.4. Tweet with a request for help transcribing a word in an eighteenth-century document.] Like a virtual chat at the coffee machine, Twitter can also facilitate brainstorming about aspects of our work. For this article, for example, I asked my colleagues on Twitter whether they would add to the categories I was planning to include as uses of Twitter in the context of early modern studies, and for suggestions of good accounts to give as examples for the various categories. Their responses—too many to thank individually, but many of them can be found on the hashtags *#medievaltwitter* and *#earlymoderntwitter*—led me to refine some of my thinking, and added some useful resources. Finally, Twitter also facilitates access to resources to which access is restricted—for example, sometimes using the hashtag *#icanhazpdf*, but more commonly in a question posed to their followers, scholars can ask whether any of their contacts provide them with digital copies of journal articles or book chapters which their own institution does not provide access to. In the case of scholars without institutional context, this kind of access to scholarship can be a lifeline, while avoiding breaching copyright and publisher’s restrictions on sharing published articles¹⁵.

#twitterendipity

The facilitation of scholarship via Twitter is often serendipitous. Once, while studying an early printed chronicle in the Bodleian Library, I came across a burn mark in the margin. I took a photograph, and tweeted it. The tweet attracted some attention, and looking at the page again, and noticed the burn mark was adjacent to a passage which mentioned a fire, reading “he was compelled by fire and smoke.”¹⁶ I tweeted a second photograph. My tweets were noticed by Richard Fitch (@tudorcook), interpretation co-ordinator for the Historic Kitchens at Hampton Court Palace, who decided to attempt to recreate the burn mark, to see if he could establish by what kind of flame it had been produced. His experiments established that the burn mark could only have been made, not by a candle falling onto the book, but by the book being held over a flame—that is, deliberately.¹⁷ This led Bob McLean, of the Glasgow University Library, to describe it as “a very knowing fiery manicule.” [INSERT FIGURE 11.5 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.5. Left: tweet about a burn mark in Higden’s *Polychronicon*, London: Peter Treveris, 1527 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, S.Seld. d.35, fol. 298); right: similar burn mark reproduced on modern paper, in response to the tweet.]

The fact that one’s Twitter stream contains a constant mix of often unrelated subjects can also lead to a specific type of serendipity, which has been branded #twitterendipity: the juxtaposition of tweets from unrelated fields of discourse (e.g., current television and seventeenth-century literature; or medieval archaeology and today’s lunch) which appear in one’s timeline as if communicating to each other. Such coincidences can be very striking, but the most remarkable ones also serve as a good reminder of an underlying dynamic: seeing one’s own and one’s colleagues’ academic work contextualised in a stream of information covering a whole range of human experience, including current events, arts and media, personal reports of daily life, entertainment, political activism, jokes and satire, and the work of academics and scientists in fields other than one’s own, inevitably leads to the boundaries

between those different categories of text and knowledge becoming blurred. [INSERT FIGURE 11.6 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.6. Tweets appearing above each other in a timeline. Left: report of an archaeological find in a potato field juxtaposed with a Thompson folk-literature motif classification randomly tweeted by @MythologyBot; right: short humorous exchange about a blurred picture presented as “what I look like right now,” juxtaposed with a tweet from @GettyMuseum about self-portraiture.] This dynamic transforms our own scholarship to something more consciously connected to those other discourses; it makes us more aware of, and can make us more comfortable with, the place of anachronism in developing historical understanding, and facilitate an attitude more amenable to the drive to connect to wider audiences, too; it leads to more urgent thinking on how to present the results of research in such a way as to appeal in those different audiences, and to more conscious thinking on how the early modern and the present are (and can be made) conversant.¹⁸

Hashtag activism

Social media also serves as a platform for (political) campaigning.¹⁹ Such campaigns lead to vibrant discussions, both on and off Twitter, where the latter often serves as the facilitating medium. The conversations are generally linked through the use of hashtags. Such campaigns can touch early modern studies directly. Thus, for example, when, following the sale of independent humanities and social sciences publisher Ashgate Publishing—a particularly important list for Early Modern studies—to multinational publishing and events company Informa PLC, in November 2015 an announcement was made that Ashgate’s North America offices were to be closed, and its staff would cease to represent the press, academics, many with relations with Ashgate’s editors spanning years, started an online petition to urge Taylor & Francis, the academic publishing division of Informa, to reverse course. By December 1st, the petition was signed by more than 7,000 people. While ultimately unsuccessful in its aim,

the campaign, carried out on Twitter using hashtag #SaveAshgate, did gain media attention in the higher education press,²⁰ led to scholarly societies adding their voice,²¹ and succeeded in channeling discussions about academic publishing, involving scholars from various fields, in blogs,²² on Facebook pages,²³ in comments sections, and, especially, on Twitter itself. And besides these collateral benefits, such hashtag activism sometimes *is* successful in achieving its immediate ends: the hashtags #examhowlers and #myownexamhowlers, started in response to the *Times Higher Education*'s yearly "exam howlers competition," a call for lecturers to submit the 'funny' errors made by their students in exams, may have been decisive in the disappearance of the feature in 2016. #StoptheDarkAges moved English Heritage to stop using the term 'Dark Ages' in its literature. Like the erasure of certain subjects in early modern books, such annotation of our surroundings via Twitter can have real life causes as well as real life effects; there is no divide between "virtual"/"online" and "the real world," in the same way that there was never a divide between the printed page and its handwritten annotations. [INSERT FIGURE 11.7 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.7. Tweet showing repeated deletions of the word 'pope' in an English printed chronicle from 1510 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Antiq.d.E.19).] #SaveWarburg raised awareness in the scholarly community about a potential threat to the management of the Warburg Institute Library, leading to a petition signed by more than twenty thousand. Following the announcement of the scrapping of art history A-levels in England, a high-profile campaign, including activism under the hashtag #WhyArtHistoryMatters, succeeded in having the policy reversed.²⁴

Such campaigns can also become part of conversations among historical scholars themselves; such, for example, was the case when during the campaign for holding a referendum about the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, a group materialised calling itself "Historians for Britain,"²⁵ campaigning for a renegotiated relationship between the UK and the EU—and part of Matthew Elliott's campaign Business

for Britain, which later morphed into Vote Leave, the official campaign for a ‘leave’ vote, of which Elliott became chief executive. The first public statement of “Historians for Britain”²⁶ was quickly answered by an open letter, signed by over a hundred scholars, a significant proportion of them in the field of early modern studies.²⁷ The letter resulted from contacts initially forged on Twitter, and from conversations carried out there, on Facebook, and in private conversation both online and offline. A blog, “Historians for History” (historiansforhistory.wordpress.com), likewise evolving out of this mobilisation (initially appropriating the original group’s name as #historiansforbritain, later also taking the title of the most prominent open letter in answer, #foginchannel) is still an active platform for the discussion of public history. Twitter is a medium not only for the annotation of the texts we study, but of our discipline itself. How the wider media ecosystem of which Twitter can steer or limit such annotation—in part by making it possible to transgress traditional borders of the audiences of academic discourse—was shown in the context of ongoing discussions of the relation between white supremacy and medieval studies, which take place on various media, among which prominently Twitter, via #medievaltwitter. In September 2017, Rachel Fulton Brown, associate professor at the University of Chicago, repeatedly brought the anti-racist work of Dorothy Kim, assistant professor at Vassar College, to the attention of Milo Yiannopoulos, blogger and former Breitbart editor, who has been permanently banned from Twitter for inciting harassment of other users, but has millions of followers on Facebook. The re-blogging of Brown’s attack on Kim on Yiannopoulos’ own website predictably led to severe online harassment of Kim, including rape threats.²⁸

Outreach

A specific type of online scholarship, making the most of Twitter’s potential to reach new and different audiences, is social scholarship, specifically aimed at sharing the fruits of

scholarship, often beyond the walls of the university.²⁹ Aimed at broadening access, this scholarship explores the possibilities of various social media to lower the threshold of access to the products of academic research, and, to some extent, in participating in it. Such uses of Twitter include academic projects which seek volunteers' help, for example for transcription or translation projects—such as Marine Lives (@marinelives), Shakespeare's World (@shaxworld) and Transcribe Bentham (@transcribentham)—which use Twitter as a platform to recruit volunteers, as well as reporting on their progress. The project Six Degrees of Francis Bacon (@6Bacon), a digital reconstruction of the early modern social network, calls for scholars to add to and revise their data. In other cases, the communication is not specifically aimed at recruiting volunteers, but outreach still entails a desire to instigate conversations: individuals, ranging from the established, such as John Overholt (@john_overholt), curator of early modern books and manuscripts at Houghton Library, to the independent, like Rebecca Rideal (@RebeccaRideal), PhD candidate, author, and founder/editor of *The History Vault* (<http://www.thehistoryvault.co.uk>); projects, such as Before Shakespeare (@B4Shakes) and the Digital Cavendish Project (@DigiCavendish); institutions like the Folger Shakespeare Library (@FolgerLibrary, @FolgerResearch) and the Bodleian Library (@bodleianlibs), all have taken to Twitter as part of their mission to reach out to audiences within and beyond the academy, sharing their findings, images of objects from their collections, and actively engaging with people's responses to their output. The popularity of historical images on Twitter has also attracted business interest, some of the most prominent of which has raised concerns among scholars: accounts such as History in Pictures (@historyinpix), for example, tweet historical images with little or no information about their provenance, and regularly with erroneous descriptions. Such proliferation of unsourced images can lead to difficulties tracing factually accurate historical information online, and thus to real obstacles for historical research.³⁰ Similarly, parody accounts like

Medieval Reactions (@medievalreacts) spread images of historical artworks with no reference to their source—leaving their followers unaware of the institutions which preserve the objects and have made the images digitally available, at great cost. The approach such accounts take to intellectual property, accuracy, as well as courtesy are strongly reminiscent of the practices of the more unscrupulous of early modern printers. Moreover, users are often unaware that such accounts regularly tweet series of advertisements to all their followers—their way of monetising their business—which they subsequently, after a time lapse, delete, so as not to show new viewers that this is their business model.

Historical authors

Another category of accounts combining historical interest, entertainment, and current events, is the historical ‘sockpuppet’—an impersonation of a historical figure: William Shakespeare (@Shakespeare), Geoffrey Chaucer (@LeVostreGC), and the appropriately multilingual Marie Guise-Lorraine (@Marie_Guise), all have their own voices on Twitter—some more, some less convincingly ‘in character’—voicing these historical personages’ observations not only on historical, but also current events, they provide a mix of irreverence and homage, historical awareness and creative anachronism, and a new way for their creators to engage with interested audiences, perhaps most akin to the Petrarchan letters to classical authors, or the appearance of Virgil as a character in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

Accounts tweeting short quotes from historical authors’ works, such as @DesideriErasmus, an account run by the Erasmus Center for Early Modern Studies in Rotterdam, which tweets aphorisms of Erasmus, regularly choose selections of texts to respond to current events—thus using the early modern text to comment on present day concerns—even if not ventriloquizing like the sockpuppet accounts. [INSERT FIGURE 11.8 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.8. A tweet from Desiderius Erasmus (@DesideriErasmus),

selected from his *Education of a Prince*, tweeted on the day of the inauguration of President Donald Trump.] Other accounts tweeting historical works are situated in time not by such direct engagement with current events, but by parallelism: thus Ben Jonson Walking (@BenJonsonsWalk) re-told Ben Jonson's 1618 walk to Scotland following the dates of the original account,³¹ and internet designer Phil Gyford set up an account (@samuelpepys) which tweets excerpts from the diaries of Samuel Pepys in real time. [INSERT FIGURE 11.9 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.9. Tweets from @samuelpepys, with responses from followers.] Followers engage with their tweets, and thus these early modern works, in a range of ways: emotive, critical, facetiously; focusing on history, topography, and personal matters. The responses become a diverse and varied annotation of the early modern text.

Annotation

Accounts also exist which tweet entire works, in automated fashion—themselves providing no further engagement with the text, just churning out bits of the text, either consecutively or in random order, at regular intervals. The account @gondibot, for example, tweets William Davenant's *Gondibert* in no particular order. Other accounts provide texts in full, in proper order: a set of twelve accounts churn out all the lines of the twelve books of Milton's *Paradise Lost* concurrently.³² The tweets from such accounts themselves can become a focus for annotation: followers retweet and respond to the texts, and conversations ensue; such annotation can take place on Twitter itself, but also on other, linked media.³³ Twitter streams churning out texts can also become commentary in and of themselves—in a fascinating experiment, @EnglishPlymUni is tweeting a mashup, sequentially, of phrases from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Woolf's *The Waves*, leading to regular serendipitous clashes between the two texts. [INSERT FIGURE 11.10 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.10. Tweets from

@EnglishPlymUni, using hashtag #miltonwoolfparadisewaves, juxtaposing fragments from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Woolf's *The Waves*.]

Not only the tweeting of text, but also annotation itself can be automated: Vimala C. Pasupathi (@exhaust_fumes) created the 'bot' NotShaxButFletcher (@TwasFletcher), a Twitter account which automatically rewrote, and then retweeted, others' tweets about Shakespeare, replacing his name with John Fletcher's (or, for example, 'Shax' with 'Fletch'), or the names of Shakespeare's plays with those by Fletcher. The aim was to explore what would happen if Shakespeare was replaced with his now less well-known collaborator;³⁴ the bot, as well as some responses to it, became an astute commentary on the dominance of one single author on our perception of early modern English literature.

Social scholarship can take a form akin to annotations, where scholars annotate 'text' for different audiences—for example, the live annotation via Twitter of the television series *Wolf Hall* on its debut at BBC television, by Catherine Fletcher (@cath_fletcher), who worked as historical adviser for the series, Joanne Paul (@joanne_paul_), Kate Maltby (@katemaltby), and many others,³⁵ using the hashtag #WolfHall, glossed the series and the historical information underpinning it like an early modern chronicle, elaborately annotated by various hands (with the difference that now, all annotators see each other's contributions, live, while in the early modern situation, only later annotators would be able to see earlier annotator's notes). Such annotations can be aimed at wide audiences, such as #WolfHall's, or at more specifically targeted academic audiences, such as appears to have been the case with Holger Syme's (@literasyme) tweeted reading of Brian Vickers' book *The One King Lear*, using hashtag #1Lear,³⁶ which was reminiscent of a furious early modern annotator complaining—but also, apparently, titillated by—the baseless lies and fables they encounter on their reading. [INSERT FIGURE 11.11 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.11. Right: two tweets from Holger Syme's live tweeted reading of Brian Vickers' *The One King Lear*. Left: tweet

showing an early modern manuscript response to a printed Dutch medieval chronicle (Oxford, Bodleian Library, H 1.8 Art.Seld.): ‘Oh God, how can the world have been so blinded?’] Syme’s live tweeting of his reading of Vickers showed a convincing new model for electronic annotation, which, due to the limitations of the electronic book, is detached from the physical (or even digital) object, but not any less engaged with its text, and because of its detachment from the book, able to reach a much larger audience (and, even, an incensed response from the author).³⁷

Other instances of tweeted annotation start out as private endeavours, with no particular audience in mind—thus, for example, I started tweeting my reading of Camden’s *Britannia*, with hashtag #doombritain, mostly to ensure I would be shamed in completing my reading. Over time it became, however, a fascinating experience in which the different regions which *Britannia* moved through attracted interested Twitter users from those regions, who would add their own annotations to mine.³⁸ These annotations were often as informative as the ones found in, for example, John Selden’s annotations to *his* copies of Camden’s *Britannia*; and like those, cross-referencing information within Camden’s work, and referring to external sources for further information; critiquing Camden’s scholarship as well as supporting it.

As with early modern annotation, tweeted annotation will always be conscious of its context and potential audiences. Linguistic choice in early modern annotation—Latin annotation of vernacular text, or multilingual annotation in response to subject matter—is also mirrored on Twitter: like Emmanuel van Meteren, whose annotation of a Middle Dutch chronicle alternated between Dutch and English depending the subject matter, I myself alternate between English and Dutch depending on the audience I seek for individual tweets (see Figure 11.12). [INSERT FIGURE 11.12 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.12. First: Tweet about bilingual annotation, showing Emmanuel van Meteren’s English annotations to Jan van

Naaldwijk's Dutch chronicle of Holland (London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C IV); second: tweet asking 'why does it all have to be in English again'.]

Like early modern annotation, where sometimes there seems to be no discernible connection between the written text and its context, Twitter annotation, too, can occasionally veer into the apparently disconnected. For personal Twitter accounts, it is usual for the user to find their own balance between scholarly and non-academic, non-work-related tweets. But even accounts of projects and institutions, even the most clearly focused, can occasionally publish apparently entirely unrelated tweets—sometimes accidentally, as when a user erroneously tweets using the project account rather than their private account.

Pedagogy

Like students' annotations of early printed books, tweeting is also used as a technology in the classroom, both in secondary and higher education. One such use is the assignment to write tweets based on a course text; such an assignment can help students to identify the perspective of various characters in a text, explore a text's humour and other subtleties, and provide a medium for creative engagement with literary or historical sources. Students can be asked to tweet 'as' one of the characters in the text—this is now a common form of engagement with, for example, Shakespeare's plays in the classroom.³⁹ The very strict modal features of the medium—the constraints posed by the 140-character limit, for example,⁴⁰ and the creative opportunities offered by hashtag—make this assignment a particularly suitable one for exploring how a specific medium constrains as well as provides particular opportunities for engagement with texts. The students' tweets become an annotation of the course text, and can then be used as the basis of further discussion (see Figure 11.13). Such discussion, too, can take place on Twitter—instead of, say, an online message board.⁴¹

[INSERT FIGURE 11.13 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.13. Tweet showing an early modern medical student's annotation to a printed text.]

Medieval, Early Modern, #earlymoderntwitter

Pre-modern 'lewed folk,' in spite of their presumed illiteracy, nevertheless had daily access to writing, both through various forms of literacy which did not conform to the medieval category of the 'literatus,' and through mediated reporting in circumstances of performed reading, or through the help of paid scribes, preachers, and other acquaintances.⁴² Similarly, while the penetration of Twitter falls much behind those of some other social media, such as Facebook, many more have access through mediated channels—from BuzzFeed lists, to Reddit threads, to Facebook reposts to embedded tweets on news websites to newspaper articles.

Marginalia were, themselves, in origin part of systems of writing which were consciously developed over time as a result of the balancing between the various interests of authors, book producers, and readers, over how the internal organization of texts could be displayed on the page.⁴³ The way in which Twitter has developed over time, engineered as a tool to annotate daily reality, in large part by, or in response to the demands of, its users—the invention of the hashtag by early users, and its adoption by the company being a good example—interestingly mirrors, concentrated in a few short years, such development; however, in the case of Twitter, ultimately all fundamental developments depended on the adoption by the corporate entity rather than merely by recognition as convention by producers and users of text alike.⁴⁴ The relation between users and the company, however, is often fraught, particularly where the interpretation of the medium's various functionalities is concerned.⁴⁵ Similarly, the functionality of the marginal annotation was not always clear-cut:

the gloss as a product of the authorial process and of the reading process, for example, were always in an uneasy relation, and medieval marginalia, even those added by readers of a text in one particular manuscript, could, over the course of the transmission of a text, become considered part of the text; a gloss included into the main text column in later versions of the text.⁴⁶ Text originally planned as marginal notes could also be relocated into the text column, and start functioning as chapter headers—as in the case of several manuscripts of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*.⁴⁷ Responses to a text could become part of the text itself. Such relocations of medieval marginalia challenge a simple classification of marginal notes as either part of the text, or readers’ responses. The adaptation of marginalia in print culture led, to some extent, to a more pronounced and certainly more visible bifurcation of marginal annotation, if perhaps more in the scholarship—the handwritten marginalia of William H. Sherman’s *Used Books* versus the printed ones of William W. E. Slights’ *Managing Readers*—than in actual practice, where the two have a more symbiotic relationship, the printed notes often the product of authors who were prolific annotators themselves, such as John Selden, whose heavily annotated “illustrations” to Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* were the product of research which itself involved heavy annotation of books owned by Selden himself. [INSERT FIGURE 11.14 HERE. Caption: Figure 11.14. Marginal note to the table of contents of *Poly-Olbion* (1613). Stanford Libraries, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, 12180. Published under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license.]

Annotation can also be the record a form of time travel: early modern annotations to medieval books and texts often bear witness to active, often emotive engagement with the past—the annotation itself dragging the past into the present of the annotator. The early modern antiquarian historian adding manicules or nota signs, cross references, and historical information to an early printed medieval chronicle, and the protestant reader diligently carrying out the order to expunge references to popes from prayer books, each updated the

books at their hands to suit their own times and contexts. Similarly, a radical reclaiming of historical text to twenty-first-century contexts occurs in Twitter annotations of medieval and early modern books. The advent of Twitter and other social media has coincided with the advent of high resolution digital photography of medieval manuscripts and early printed books, and with the adaptation of Creative Commons licenses by libraries and museums. This is allowing new re-appropriations of medieval and early modern text to occur in digital contexts.

Ultimately, however, early modern marginalia were not #earlymoderntwitter. The absence of immediate world-wide reach, the absence of an NYSE-listed company controlling the medium, the absence of automation, bot networks, and spam, all make the blank spaces of the manuscript or early printed page a very different carrier of information. The allegorical space of a bird, throughout the early modern period, remained occupied by birds themselves: “*Men speak the language of Men, Birds of Birds.*”⁴⁸

¹ [Fuller], “To the Worshipfull, ROGER LE STRANGE Esquire,” sig. A2r.

² Kim, “#medievaltwitter.”

³ See Andrew, *Two Early Renaissance Bird Poems*.

⁴ *A True Relation of the Prodigious Battle of Birds*.

⁵ *A Battell of Birds Most Strangly Fought in Ireland; The Frenchmens Wonder, or, The Battle of the Birds*.

⁶ [Fuller], *Ornithologie*.

⁷ *The Birds Harmony*.

⁸ C. H., *The Birds Noats on May Day Last*.

⁹ *The Pleasant History of Cawwood the Rook, or, The Assembly of Birds*.

¹⁰ Kim, “#medievaltwitter.”

¹¹ For medieval communities of learning, and the role of texts and written communication in their development, see, e.g., Mews and Crossley, *Communities of Learning Networks*.

¹² Veletsianos and Kimmons, “Networked Participatory Scholarship,” 768.

¹³ Permission for reproduction of all tweets included in this article was sought, in most cases granted, and in none denied.

¹⁴ Sherman, *Used Books*, 25–52; see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 135–52, for the role of *notae* in memorisation and heuristics.

¹⁵ Science Direct, for example, explicitly allows the sharing of its content by affiliates of subscribing institutions: http://help.sciencedirect.com/Content/sharing_pubs.htm.

¹⁶ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon* (London: Peter Treveris, 1527), Bodleian Library (S.Seld. d.35, fol. 298).

¹⁷ Tweet by Robert MacLean (@bob_maclean):

https://twitter.com/bob_maclean/status/529989657518669824, 5 November 2014.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Vimala C. Pasupathi (@Exhaust_Fumes) for this formulation.

¹⁹ See prominently Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*.

²⁰ Jaschik, "Concerns Over Ashgate Publishing's Future;" Kolowich, "In Fight Over Academic Publishing House."

²¹ E.g., statement from the Byzantine Studies Association of America, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxpHDrS-z5XYZTFDYThGNnpZbVE/view>; from the College Art Association: <http://www.collegeart.org/advocacy/2015/12/01/caa-president-dewitt-godfrey-releases-statement-on-ashgate-acquisition/>.

²² E.g., Kennedy, "#SaveAshgate, from All of Us."

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/SaveAshgatePublishing/>

²⁴ Weale, "Art history A-level saved after high-profile campaign."

²⁵ Historians for Britain's website, historiansforbritain.org, is now mostly defunct, but it is archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20160224115252/http://historiansforbritain.org/>. While maintaining on its website that it did not campaign for the UK to leave the European Union, Historians for Britain later shared its office and telephone number with the official Vote Leave campaign. Matthew Elliott described the history of Business for Britain in: "How Business for Britain helped change the course of history in three short years."

²⁶ Abulafia, "The 'Historians for Britain' campaign."

²⁷ Andress, et al., "Fog in Channel, Historians Isolated."

²⁸ See Van Norden, "What's With Nazis And Knights?" and Dr. Virago, "How to Signal That You're a Bully."

²⁹ See Veletsianos, *Social Media in Academia*, 6–16.

³⁰ Werner, "It's history, not a viral feed."

³¹ <http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/ben-jonsons-walk/>

³² Reid, "Milton Bot Flock: Tweeting John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in perpetuity."

³³ E.g., Reid, "John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I: Annotated."

³⁴ See Pasupathi, "#NotShaxButFletch."

³⁵ See Fletcher, "Wolf Hall Ep 1 - some top live history tweets."

³⁶ See Symes, "Syme on Vickers, The One King Lear, Preface."

³⁷ Reisz, "Shakespeare scholar vents 500-tweet 'bitterly sarcastic' attack on book."

³⁸ See Levelt, "#DoomBritain: Reading Camden's *Britannia* (Philemon Holland translation, 1610)."

³⁹ See, e.g., the Hamlet Twitter assignment of Sarah Mulhern Gross (@thereadingzone): <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zRK3yFNbujTkWVlrlO4ftejWjibthKkr-pb-jbQ3sPM/edit?usp=sharing>, and my Iliad Twitter assignment: Levelt, "#Iliad."

⁴⁰ This has since the writing of this chapter been extended to 280 characters, but, as I point out to students, pre-modern literature long predates that change.

⁴¹ Ulliyot, "English 205: The Twitter Assignment."

⁴² The development of different forms of literacy among the laity are discussed by Malcolm B. Parkes in, "The Literacy of the Laity," *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, 275–97; McKitterick, *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*.

⁴³ Parkes, "The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book," *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, 35–70.

⁴⁴ See for the development of Twitter's features, e.g., Dredge, "Twitter changes."; for its corporate history, Bilton, *Hatching Twitter*.

⁴⁵ A good example is the disagreement between the company and its users over the significance of the ‘favourite’ function, as exposed when Twitter changed the star button into a heart button: Meyer, “Twitter Unfaves Itself.”

⁴⁶ See for an example Stork, *Through a gloss darkly*, 44; sometimes such incorporations made the text unintelligible: Bammesberger, “Hidden Glosses in Manuscripts of Old English Poetry,” 45–6.

⁴⁷ See Echard, “Glossing Gower,” 237–56.

⁴⁸ [Fuller], *Ornithologie*, sig. B3v.